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SUBJECT: RESPONSE : IMPACT OF RISING FOOD / COMMODITY PRICES -
FRANCE: FOOD AID AND PROTECTIONNISM

REF: 2008 STATE 039410

¶1. SUMMARY: The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Agriculture (MinAg) recently announced the creation of a working group on the global food security issue. This working group will present to the Government of France (GOF) proposals for both immediate actions and medium and long-term policies to address the global food security issue. President Sarkozy also announced April 18 that France will more than double its funding to the World Food Program and in his announcement linked the food security issue to climate change. Ag Minister Barnier also expressed France's intention to extend the French initiative to the EU level. He also stressed that the current food security crisis highlights the need to resist pressure for agricultural trade liberalization in the newly announced WTO talks and to reform CAP. END SUMMARY

¶2. The French working group on Food Security will gather officials from both Min Ag and MFA as well as participants from the Ministries of Finance, Industry and Cooperation. Scientists from various agricultural research organizations will also participate.

¶3. The working group will propose initial actions to support endangered populations in the most vulnerable countries. It could include emergency deliveries of food or financial support for locally purchase food. In the medium term, the working group will propose policies to increase global food supply in the coming months as well as to strengthen early warning systems and management future food crises. Finally, the working group will make recommendations to the GOF on supporting long-term farm policies in developing countries to increase their self-sufficiency and food security. President Sarkozy announced that France will also more than double its funding of the World Food Program to euros 60 million (USD 100 million) in 2008. 2007 France funding of the WFP amounted to USD 33 millions.

¶4. President Sarkozy speaking at the MEM (Major Economies Meeting) meeting on climate change April 18 highlighted the link between food security and climate changes. In France's views, more frequent droughts, reduced seafood and farm supply due to climate-related disasters increase the risk of a global food crisis. He urged developed economies to be proactive on curbing greenhouse gas

production.

15. Ag Minister Barnier echoed France's initiative at the EU Agricultural Council of April 15. He announced that France will initiate an EU conference on global food security likely to be held in Brussels in July 2008 at the beginning of the French EU presidency. But, he also, for the first time, made a link between the ongoing WTO talks in Geneva and the current food security crisis. Earlier in the week, Min Ag issued a press release stating that Agriculture should not be the "adjusting variable" of the WTO negotiations. In a written response to a French parliamentarian, Ag Minister Barnier also stated that France prefers no WTO agreement to a bad agreement, because "in a bad agreement, the farm sector of the developing countries will be the most hurt." Barnier wrote, in an op-ed on April 17 that the current food security crisis illustrates the need to limit if not to drop any proposed liberalization of the Common Agricultural Policy.

16. Comment: The Global food security issue has made the headlines in France. European, U.S. and other countries' biofuel programs have been partly blamed for the hike in global commodity and food prices. What is new is that this issue is now being used by the GOF to advance its policy objectives relative to the WTO Doha negotiations and CAP reform. Embassy Paris is preparing an op-ed piece to counter the Ag Minister's contention that free trade is detrimental to the world food supply situation. End comment.

STAPLETON